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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of 9 issues of a newsletter providing information on current child advocacy initiatives and accomplishments. Each issue describes one local or state child advocacy program or initiative and its accomplishments. The issues of this publication represent a series of short information pieces to highlight the National Association of Child Associates (NACA) member initiatives that have resulted in concrete outcomes positively affecting children. The following issues were published for months in 2001: (1) "Securing Tax Credits for Low-Income Working Families in New Jersey" (January); (2) "Securing Foster Parents' Access to Low-Interest Home Loans in Washington" (February); (3) "Securing Funding for Children's Programs in San Francisco" (March); (4) "Contributing to Efforts To Close Boot Camps for Youth in Maryland" (April); (5) "Securing Supports for Foster Care Graduates in Arizona" (June); (6) "Improving Family Access to Benefits in the Wake of Welfare Reform in Washington" (July); (7) "Securing Emergency Pediatric Care in Westchester County, New York" (August); (8) "Improving Children's Oral Health with Water Fluoridation in San Antonio, Texas" (September); and (9) "Persuading Policy Makers To use Beer Tax and TANF To Fund Early Care Options in Arkansas" (October). (KB)

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Child Advocates Making a Difference, 2001.

National Association of Child Advocates
Washington, DC

Bryan Goodman, Editor

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

The Association for Children of New Jersey Secures Tax Credit For Low-Income Working Families

In 1999, the Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA), faced a challenge. The organization's research showed that low-income, working families were on the rise and these families were paying a greater portion of state and local sales and property taxes than upper income families. In order for these families to continue working and not rely on public assistance, they needed the support of a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Using legislative "Fact Sheets" and working closely with the Governor's Office, ACNJ helped to secure an EITC for an eligible 280,000 working families with low-incomes.

What Is An Earned Income Tax Credit?

An EITC is a program that provides tax reductions and wage supplements for low and moderate-income working families. Close to 20 million families and individuals filing federal income taxes claim the federal EITC. This tax provision has been in effect since 1975 and was expanded in 1986, 1990 and 1993.

Because of the success of the federal EITC in moving families out of poverty while encouraging work, many states began implementing similar tax credits on the state level in the 1990s. A total of 15 states now offer the state EITC, which is typically a percentage of the federal EITC. The state Earned Income Tax Credit offsets various state and local taxes paid by low-income families by giving them a refundable tax credit. The credit often exceeds any income taxes that are owed, and the tax filer receives the difference in the form of a rebate check.

> ACNJ helped secure legislation making 280,000 New Jersey families eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Working With the Media, Governor and State Legislature

ACNJ had laid out its advocacy agenda on behalf of low-income working parents in 1999 as part of its State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI) grant project. The SFAI is a national project aimed at developing fiscal data analysis at the state level in an effort to better monitor state tax and budget policy.

With the grant, ACNJ's first objective was to raise the state's extremely low income tax threshold – a family of four began paying state income tax if they earned more than $7,500 per year, a figure well below the federal poverty level. A 1999 state law was enacted to raise the threshold over three years so that in 2001, a family of four will begin paying state income tax if they earn more than $20,000 a year, a figure slightly above the federal poverty level but still considered low-income. ACNJ realized that a state EITC would be viewed as the next best step in creating a more progressive income tax structure, allowing working families to live independently.

In September of 1999, ACNJ released a report on low-income families called *Working – But Still Poor in New Jersey*. The report, which recommended a state EITC, garnered widespread press coverage, including a story in the New Jersey section of *The New York Times*.

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ACNJ then served as host of a statewide education forum on the EITC in December 1999. Panelists included national EITC experts, including someone involved in an EITC campaign in another state, who discussed the potential for a New Jersey program. Then ACNJ assisted New Jersey's major newspaper the *Star-Ledger* in publishing two full-page editorials in December on the plight of the working poor.

ACNJ's efforts led to a meeting with Governor Christine Todd Whitman's staff to discuss the merits of implementing a state EITC. Governor Whitman proposed a basic program where the tax credit would be phased in over four years, from 10 percent to 20 percent of the federal tax credit. It would also be limited to families with children, and to those earning less than $20,000 a year (the federal EITC exceeds these standards).

ACNJ assembled a panel of its staff to review the needs of the working poor, consider the proposal, and meet with the staff from the Department of Human Services who explained details of the Governor's proposal. Concluding that it was critical to get an EITC in place and work to expand it later, ACNJ chose to support the Governor's initiative. Moreover, the organization determined that, though there were limitations to the proposal, it did target people most in need.

ACNJ then turned its attention to convincing the state legislature of the importance of the plan. This required not only top-notch research, but also a clean, crisp, organized plan to communicate the problem to legislators in terms they would understand. Lawmakers would have to feel affected by the problem and benefit from the solution.

To accomplish this, ACNJ distributed toolkits that included "Legislative Fact Sheets" to legislators showing the number of their constituents who would be eligible for the program and the dollar value of such benefits.

The organization also participated in a press conference with the state Assembly Speaker, Jack Collins, who announced his support of the legislation. Additionally, ACNJ met with all legislators and key staff on the Budget and Appropriations Committees to discuss the fiscal impacts of the proposal. The organization made the case that state tax credits would provide critical support to low-income families struggling to make ends meet, and is a necessary part of welfare reform in order to prevent people from falling back into the system. ACNJ staff also explained how it would reduce the disproportionate tax burden on the working p[illegible]

> "Welfare reform has moved many more families into work but not necessarily out of poverty," said ACNJ Associate Director Cecilia Zalkind. "A state EITC program is an important way to help these families take the next step toward self-sufficiency."

Meeting the Challenge

ACNJ's research and planning proved successful. The bill passed both chambers of the legislature and was signed into law on August 14, 2000, making 280,000 New Jersey families eligible for the EITC. The program will be effective for tax year 2000 at 10 percent of the federal credit and will gradually increase to 20 percent over four years. So a parent with two children and income of $10,000 will get a state EITC of $338 during this year's tax season, in addition to their federal EITC.

New Jersey's EITC is estimated to cost $45 million in FY 2001, rising to $100 million in FY 2004. The state plans to pay for its EITC out of a combination of General Funds and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program funds, to the extent allowed by federal guidelines.

New Jersey is in a unique political environment. The Governor recently accepted a position in the Bush Administration and potential successors are positioning themselves for a run in 2002. ACNJ's efforts to secure support from Collins and the Senate President, Donald DiFrancesco—who will serve as acting Governor and is a Republican gubernatorial candidate—not only helped secure a state EITC, but will also serve to establish the needs of "the working poor" as a campaign issue.

Contacts

Jeannette Russo
Child-Based Budgeting Project Director
Association for Children of New Jersey
35 Halsey Street, Newark, NJ 07102
Tel: (973) 643-3876
Fax: (973) 643-9153
Email: Jrusso@acnj.org
Web: acnj.org

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Making a Difference

Children's Alliance: Securing Foster Parents' Access to Low-Interest Home Loans

In the summer of 2000, Washington State's Children's Alliance, a member of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA), learned of a Washington State Housing Finance Commission (HFC) policy prohibiting foster parents from receiving low-interest home loans.

The Children's Alliance immediately understood the ramifications of such a policy on the welfare of children in foster care. They knew the importance of foster parent home ownership in creating much needed stability for children in foster care. This prompted the Children's Alliance to take action.

By taking advantage of legal research, mobilizing its members and educating the general public about HFC's policy of denying low-interest home loans to foster parents, the Children's Alliance successfully influenced the HFC to change the policy so low-interest home loans are now available to eligible foster parents. Today, because of their efforts, 6,500 foster parents in the state may be eligible for low-interest home loans. Moreover, the Children's Alliance's success in this area has resulted in correspondence by Washington's HFC to Housing Commissions nationwide suggesting similar changes.

> The Children's Alliance convinced the Housing Finance Commission to change its policy prohibiting foster parents from receiving low-interest home loans and as a result provided new financing options to 6,500 foster parents who wish to buy a home.

Raising The Issue

The Children's Alliance first learned of the HFC policy from Elisa Thorson, who was denied a home loan because she was a foster parent. Thorson applied for a low-interest loan through the HFC, and was told repeatedly she was eligible, but after moving into her new home as a renter pending the final closing, she was told she would not receive the loan because foster care was considered a business.

Under the HFC's "15 percent rule," no more than 15 percent of the home being purchased may be used for trade or business. While paying rent that was significantly higher than what the mortgage payment would have been, Ms. Thorson took her complaint to the HFC. She was told that the policy was legal and would not be changed. The Children's Alliance stepped in and took action.

Is Foster Care a Business?

The Children's Alliance collaborated with Columbia Legal Services to conduct research to determine if, in legal terms, foster care was truly a business. Extensive research concluded that foster care is indeed *not* a business and that, by denying these loans to foster parents, HFC was discriminating based on family status as well as disability in some cases (many children in foster care have special needs).

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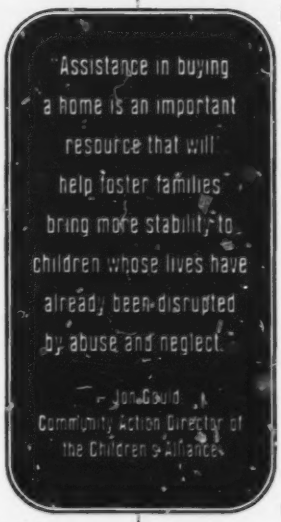
Specifically, it was determined that not only was there no basis for the denial but that such a denial was in fact a violation of the federal Fair Housing Act and the Washington law against housing discrimination.

Making Voices Heard

Following numerous unsuccessful attempts to engage HFC in discussions over this issue, the Children's Alliance developed a plan of action to mobilize and educate Washington citizens.


"Assistance in buying a home is an important resource that will help foster families bring more stability to children whose lives have already been disrupted by abuse and neglect."
- Jon Gould
Community Action Director of the Children's Alliance

The HFC is a publicly accountable, state government-chartered entity. The Children's Alliance used this public accountability as a cornerstone of its strategy for changing policy. By disseminating an action alert to its 3,000 Children's Action Network members and by bringing the issue to the attention of the general public, the Children's Alliance was able to bring public sentiment to bear on the HFC. The question, "Is Foster Care a Business" was used in multiple media sources, such as editorials in the local newspaper, to highlight the unfair policy as well as the needs of foster parents in general.

The Children's Alliance in Washington has always used action alerts in addition to press releases, as an effective way to inform its members about issues and events that affect children. Generally, these alerts focus on legislative issues, appearing once a week during the legislative session. Out of session, the alerts are used less frequently to highlight important issues not having to do with the legislature. The alerts detailed the issue and encouraged people to contact the HFC, complete with instructions on communicating opinions to officials.

Thanks to funding from NACA's Devolution Project (sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation), the Children's Alliance had significantly improved their action alert system by merging member data with state legislators' databases. This allowed the Children's Alliance's technical staff to create action alerts that were individualized based on each member's legislative district. Under this new system, members were able to easily click on their legislators' email addresses and voice their concerns over the foster care issue. Response rates to alerts have increased substantially since the implementation of this new system.

Through these means, the Children's Alliance secured public support to help HFC understand the importance of home ownership in creating stability for children in foster care.

Impact Update

As a result of the Children's Alliance's efforts, the Directors of Washington State's Housing Finance Commission changed its policy. As many as 6,500 foster parents may now receive low-interest home loans, providing they are otherwise eligible. Further, all of the foster families in the state of Washington have received a letter detailing their eligibility for these loans. The Foster Parent Association of Washington has printed a piece in their newsletter announcing the policy change, and housing counseling groups have been notified as well. Finally, every Housing Commission in the United States received a letter from the Washington State HFC detailing the legal and ethical issues concerning the policy change, and suggesting a similar change by other states.

Elisa Thorson has now closed on the sale of her home, and she, her adopted child, and her foster child are enjoying the increased stability that home ownership brings, as well as the financial savings. Other foster families report that they are now thinking of buying a home using an HFC low-interest home loan.

Contacts

Jon Gould, *Community Action Director*
The Children's Alliance
172 20th Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98122
206/324-0340 phone
206//325-6291 fax
E-mail: seattle@childrensalliance.org
Website: www.childrensalliance.org

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Making a Difference

San Francisco's Coleman Advocates Secures Funding For Children's Programs

Approaching the November 2000 elections, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth (Coleman), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA), faced a challenge. A charter clause allocating a portion of San Francisco's property taxes for children's services was set to expire, to the detriment of children.

By conducting a well-developed and comprehensive campaign initiative, Coleman Advocates successfully landed the renewal of the Children's Fund on the November ballot. Due to Coleman's sophisticated campaign, San Franciscans not only approved the measure, they increased the amount allocated to the Children's Fund.

What is the Children's Fund?

The Children's Fund, established through a groundbreaking city charter amendment in 1991, allocated a portion of the city's property taxes to support programs for youth, children and families in San Francisco.

In the last nine years this landmark provision allocated over $122 million in funding for more than 180 programs, such as early childhood development centers, health services and non-school hour recreation programs.

The Children's Fund ensures that a fixed portion of the city's budget goes to children's programs. This takes away the uncertainty that would exist without such a fund, where the city would decide budget to budget whether surpluses yielded funding to children's programs.

> One of the most remarkable aspects of the whole process was the extent to which it was driven by children's advocates as opposed to public officials.
> – Margaret Brodkin, Executive Director of Coleman Advocates

Coleman's Campaign to Re-authorize Children's Funding

Re-authorizing funding for the Children's Fund would be no easy feat, even for the veteran child advocates at Coleman. The effort would require time, people and energy. It would take focus. It would take a city-wide campaign.

Coleman was not battling major opposition but there were challenges. There was no controversial component repelling voters, therefore voters were apathetic. And Coleman needed to craft legislation that would build on the success of the Children's Fund and garner consensus among the many stakeholders.

To develop consensus, Coleman worked for a year meeting with city officials, representatives of consumer groups, child service providers and other groups to determine the best way to develop the legislation.

Once stakeholders reached a consensus, Coleman addressed the apathy surrounding the issue. Voters, inundated with messages on more controversial issues, viewed the Children's Fund as something that would easily pass. Many had a narrow understanding of the Fund's fundamental impact. They would soon learn.

Aware of this voter apathy, Coleman prepared to answer questions asked by city officials, while framing the issue as important for San Franciscans, many of whom didn't have children.

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First, Coleman staff — along with a coalition of activists — appealed to city officials with polling data to demonstrate public support. All the members of San Francisco's governing Board of Supervisors were up for re-election. Supervisors accustomed to city-wide races were forced, for the first time, to compete in district elections. With this in mind, Coleman made certain the opinion polls reflected district sentiment. The results, packaged for each district Supervisor, showed how his or her constituents viewed renewing the funding, raising children in San Francisco and spending on programs for children, among other issues. This education effort got the issue on the ballot.

In a business age, when outcomes and accountability are demanded, San Franciscans needed to see results from the Children's Fund. Coleman conducted an evaluation to determine the impact of the Children's Fund. The evaluation allowed Coleman to objectively present the Children's Fund as benefiting every neighborhood in the city, funding programs such as child development centers and new health and recreation services operated by public schools during non-school hours throughout the city.

To present these accomplishments to the public, the organization sought the help of volunteers, particularly youth volunteers. These volunteers, sent to public hearings and meetings, spoke of the accomplishments of the Children's Fund. They also spoke personally of the importance of renewing a Fund that had been so crucial to their well-being.

Youth volunteers were particularly effective because they spoke to organizations with which they had some familiarity. For example, youths from the employment program spoke at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, and one young woman from a girl's empowerment program relayed the importance of the Children's Fund to the National Women's Political Caucus. Additionally, a group of young people from neighborhood centers talked with members of the Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods.

In another effective component to the campaign, Coleman electronically called 80,000 households throughout the city promoting the Children's Fund. The youth also designed sleek campaign materials such as doorhangers and posters touting the virtues of the Children's Fund.

> "Children's issues have gained political clout all across America, say analysts, and San Francisco has been a principal reason why."
> — The Christian Science Monitor

Volunteers were enlisted in every city district to distribute campaign materials to bring home the need for renewing the Children's Fund and reasserting the importance of support from leaders hoping to win those districts. Coleman was strategic in organizing these district volunteers by recruiting, training and nurturing children's advocates in each area of the city.

Meeting the Challenge

To many indifferent San Franciscans one thing became clear: the Children's Fund was vital to the well-being of the city's children. Support for the renewal was one of the broadest in the city's history, with support coming from a range of religious affiliations, political parties and groups. In a move that garnered national attention, city voters overwhelmingly approved funding for 15 more years, increasing the amount from 2.5% to 3% of the city's general fund.

Attached to the renewal of the Children's Fund was a host of improvements governing how the city deals with funding children's programs. These included devising a three-year planning cycle for all children's services, with community input through neighborhood meetings and a poll. A plan for all children's services in the city must now be developed and every city department must be involved. Plus, the city is required to have an oversight and planning body created for children's services, which includes parents and youth and a mandated program evaluation.

Renewal of the measure, with the added benefits, ensured that San Francisco's Children's Fund would serve as a model to other cities as it has since 1991. In fact, the Christian Science Monitor noted the similar programs were established in Seattle, Washington; Oakland, California and in one Arizona county because of San Francisco's groundbreaking work.

One of the most important outcomes of the campaign was that San Francisco's child advocacy base was re-energized, with many new leaders surfacing. The coalitions, formed through the campaign to renew the Children's Fund, still exist. This is promising for children and youth in San Francisco and for the future of the city.

Contact

Margaret Brodkin, *Executive Director*
Coleman Advocates for
Children and Youth
459 Vienna Street
San Francisco, CA 94112
(415) 239-0161 • (415) 239-0584 (fax)
mbrodkin@colemanadvocates.org

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Making a Difference

Getting Tough on the Juvenile Justice System:
Efforts Lead to Boot Camp Closures and Other Reforms

In 1998, NACA members Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) and Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) joined forces to launch the Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition (the Coalition). With the help of the Coalition — which today has 125 organizational and hundreds of individual members — a series of articles appeared in the Baltimore Sun in late 1999 highlighting the Maryland boot camp system. Various other articles and editorials describing the significant problems in the juvenile justice system ensued. These articles, and the public outcry that resulted, led to the ouster of five senior Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) officials — including the cabinet Secretary. It also included the closing of juvenile boot camps in the state.

The Coalition has seized every opportunity to advance a sweeping reform agenda. It has promoted comprehensive juvenile justice reform legislation during the 2000 and 2001 legislative sessions. The Department's operating budget increased by $30 million over two years. This year, with Coalition prompting, budget language has been adopted that would phase out Cheltenham Youth Facility, a notorious facility, and link its closure to increased funds for community-based services.

The Coalition's voice is heard not only in the press, but through issue briefs, reports, testimony, and representation on important task forces and commissions. Advocacy continues on many fronts to create a whole new landscape for juvenile justice in the state. The goal is to move from an incarceration-heavy model to one that emphasizes youth development and community-based services for both delinquency prevention and after-care.

Maryland "Gets Tough" On Youthful Offenders

Maryland's Department of Juvenile Justice had an aggressive approach to juvenile crime. The effort on the part of DJJ administrators as well as some legislators to "get tough" on juvenile offenders included incarcerating them in military-style camps, called boot camps, designed to provide more discipline and structure in their lives. Another facet of the "get tough" campaign was the erosion of the juvenile court jurisdiction, whereby youths were treated, tried, and sentenced as adults. This has continued to occur despite the evidence that this approach does not result in improved outcomes for youth or an increase in public safety.

> To reform the Maryland Juvenile Justice System, NACA members ACY and MARFY launched an aggressive communications campaign. Their efforts were central to the closure of Maryland's boot camps and subsequent reform in the juvenile justice system.

Getting the Word Out

In order to make juvenile justice reform the focus of immediate efforts, Maryland's ACY and MARFY decided to form the Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition. Their goals were to stop the misuse and overuse of the detention of juveniles, to curb the overrepresentation of minorities in the juvenile justice system, to prevent the transfer of youths to the adult court system, and to expand dramatically youth development and delinquency prevention services.

MJJC's Communications Director worked on an aggressive campaign aimed at the local media, especially the *Baltimore Sun*. This campaign relied on press releases from the Coalition and cooperation with editors and journalists. Soon ACY, MARFY, and the Coalition became a prime information and referral source for the media covering juvenile justice. Together they increased public awareness of the need for juvenile justice reforms and the need for services and supervision after release from juvenile detention facilities.

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The Coalition was a regular source for the *Baltimore Sun's* most provocative pieces on juvenile justice, including a follow-up to a four article series on the boot camp system, initiated by the *Sun*, that followed a group of youths through the system for five months and then after their release for nine months. Todd Richissin, the reporter, and Andre Chung, the photographer, would later win an award from NACA for covering the boot camps and exposing horrifying physical abuse in the military-style setting.

The Sun's readers met a group of youth (called "Charlie Squad") serving five months in a Maryland boot camp. Through the course of the series, readers followed Charlie Squad through their time in the camps, and shared the pain and degradation of the experience. Finally, readers followed the youths out of the camp and into the challenges of the real world, where virtually none of the youths had a safe or stable home, or any sort of aftercare or case management from the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Richissin and Chung found that 80 percent of the youths they followed returned to the juvenile justice system within six months of their release. This was primarily because there was no care for them after the camps. As a result of the public outcry created by this media coverage, the Governor of Maryland and several key legislators were forced to recognize problems facing juveniles in the state.

Meeting the Need for Changes in the System

This awareness by state leaders, aided by the Coalition's efforts, led to several key changes in Maryland's juvenile justice system. A particularly dramatic change was the departure of five senior officials from the DJJ, including the DJJ cabinet Secretary.

While remaining an independent voice for children, the Coalition has also become an important player in policy overhaul. Last year, there was an increase of $25 million in the DJJ operating budget. These new funds will be used to hire more caseworkers and probation officers, to create small, local detention facilities for juvenile delinquents, and to improve existing juvenile detention facilities and youth centers. The Coalition has pressed for detailed standards to govern detention facilities, and standards are slated for adoption.

> The Coalition's goal was to shine a light upon the deficiencies of the juvenile justice system, generate public support for sweeping reform, and make a child's contact with the system an opportunity for services and rehabilitation, not degradation.
>
> — Jann Jackson
> Executive Director of ACY

An especially striking success was the closing of the three boot camps in the state and a renewed national debate regarding the lack of effectiveness of this popular "get tough" program. The Maryland boot camps held 70-80 juveniles at any given time. During the boot camps' two year tenure, potentially hundreds of juveniles were exposed to harsh discipline and physical abuse. The closing of these camps potentially saved hundreds more from these destructive experiences.

The Coalition has used public awareness as a means of stimulating policy changes. Through an organized, aggressive strategic communications campaign and legislative advocacy, the Coalition got the Governor's attention, proposed numerous legislative remedies including increased funding for DJJ, and created a groundswell of public support for young people not to be abused at the hands of the juvenile justice system.

Advocates agree, however, that Maryland still has a long way to go in reforming its juvenile justice system and in addressing the erosion of juvenile court jurisdiction. The Coalition intends to continue its campaign to help those children still being harmed by the Maryland juvenile justice system. The goal for 2002 is to ensure demolition of the Chelthenham Youth Facility and the transfer of funds to community-based family focused services. The Coalition is working closely with local and national groups, such as Maryland's Inter-denominational Ministerial Alliance, The Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice, Building Blocks for Youth, and the Youth Law Center, to promote these goals. Information on the Close Cheltenham Campaign is available at www.closecheltenham.org.

Contact

Jann Jackson, *Executive Director*
Advocates for Children and Youth
34 Market Place • 5th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202-4034
410-547-9200 (phone)
410-547-8690 (fax)
E-mail: director@acy.org

Jim McComb, *Executive Director*
Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth
PO Box 220 • Arnold, MD 21012
410-974-4901 (phone)
410-757-9530 (fax)
E-mail: marfy@erols.com
www.closecheltenham.org

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Making a Difference

Child Advocates Secure Supports For Foster Care Graduates

For years the country has placed unrealistic expectations on youths who age out of foster care once they turn 18, expecting them to live independently without family support or governmental assistance.

The system is slowly but surely changing, thanks in no small part to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, a new federal law providing increased resources, supports, and matching funds to states willing to expand Medicaid coverage to youths 18-21 years of age who have aged out of foster care. Working with state officials and agencies, Arizona's Children's Action Alliance (CAA), a National Association of Child Advocates (NACA) member, helped the state become one of the first to extend Medicaid coverage to age 21 for foster graduates under the Chafee Act. Arizona's new law also allows the state to help Arizona youths with housing, counseling, employment and education until their 21st birthday.

> The work of CAA and ACNJ will help thousands of youths aged 18-21 secure much needed assistance as they near adulthood.

Why Extending Coverage Is Possible Now

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (Chafee Act), which in December 1999 replaced the prior Independent Living Program, offers states matching funds to provide youths ages 18-21 who have graduated from foster care with Medicaid coverage, an array of services, room and board, and other supports to help them achieve a successful transition to independence.

Getting the Idea and Presenting It to Legislators

CAA knew about the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act and was able to develop a better understanding by reading an article authored by Heitzi Epstein, the Senior Policy and Advocacy Specialist for NACA. After consulting further with Epstein, CAA knew that extending support for foster youths ages 18-21 was the right thing to do, but it would take some work to convince Arizona legislators of that fact. CAA had worked with lawmakers the year before on legislation for homeless children. Because of CAA's previous work, policy makers were familiar with the plight of homeless youths, many of whom are products of a foster care system all too willing to deny them support once they turn 18. CAA then worked with legislators and the state departments to develop legislation that would extend program supports and Medicaid coverage to youths leaving the foster care system.

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During the legislative session, CAA also sent e-mail alerts to advocates at the local level and these advocates called legislators to voice their support.

Meanwhile, an influential legislator was on a campaign of her own. Convinced that existing state programs for older youths in foster care were run inefficiently, this policy maker tried to block this legislation when it reached the Arizona House of Representatives. CAA effectively rallied other legislators who overwhelmingly supported this program expansion.

> The Arizona legislature agreed that it was unrealistic to expect someone to become an adult in one day—on his or her 18th birthday.
>
> — Beth Rosenberg
> Senior Program Associate for Children's Action Alliance

Instead of asking legislators to go through the appropriations process (possibly leading to the death of the proposal), CAA worked jointly with the Medicaid Agency and Foster Care Agency to promote a funding strategy. The two agencies agreed, with legislative approval, to provide the state match for the number of youths expected to enroll in the Medicaid program with money already appropriated to the state Foster Care Agency.

When the law passed in April of 2000, only foster youths living below 200% of the federal poverty level were eligible for Medicaid services. In 2001, CAA took its case back to the state legislature and won an amendment to the law that will, beginning in August of this year, allow every foster youth in care at age 18 to access Medicaid up to age 21, regardless of income.

As a part of the 2000 Arizona law, the state also provides housing, counseling, employment services and education to complement youths' own efforts to reach independence by their 21st birthday. CAA continues to build on the Chafee Act through its Higher Education Partnership, which will help kids understand the importance of higher education and eventually may provide tuition waivers, other scholarships and supportive services to help them succeed in their educational pursuits beyond high school.

NACA's New Jersey Member Also Stirs Change For State Foster Care Graduates

CAA is not alone in its extraordinary work. Following attendance at a NACA conference and review of NACA-produced materials, Ceil Zalkind from the Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), another NACA member, moved swiftly to secure legislation to extend Medicaid coverage to New Jersey's 18-21 year olds who were in foster care. Because of Zalkind's well-developed relationship with policy makers, she was able to have the Medicaid extension included in legislation already pending. Taking a cue from the successful efforts in Arizona and New Jersey, other state legislatures have moved to secure legislation offering some of the essentials to youths graduating from the foster care system.

Contacts

Beth Rosenberg
Senior Program Associate
Children's Action Alliance
4001 North 3rd Street
Suite 160
Phoenix, AZ 85012
602-266-0707 (phone)
602-263-8792 (fax)
Email: brosenberg@azchildren.org
www.azchildren.org

Ceil Zalkind
Association for Children of New Jersey
35 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07102
973-643-3876 (phone)
973-643-9153 (fax)
Email: czalkind@acnj.org
www.acnj.org

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Help Working Families By Improving Access to Benefits In the Wake of Welfare Reform

When the nation's welfare system was reformed in 1996, a promise was made that government would help low-income families get and keep jobs. Lawmakers insisted that health insurance, food stamps and child care assistance would not be "bundled" with cash assistance. Families were supposed to leave welfare with these benefits intact to ease their transition from welfare to work. Instead many thousands of working families who left welfare found themselves suddenly without these crucial supports. They were wrongfully dropped and often illegally terminated.

The National Association of Child Advocates' (NACA) Washington State member, the Children's Alliance (CA) – working with a coalition of experts on children's issues – formed the Access to Benefits Working Group (Working Group) in May of 1999. The group examined why certain public benefits for low-income families were underutilized and proposed solutions. One of the most novel efforts undertaken was to change the way the state measured its own success around welfare reform.

The Working Group convinced the Governor to inform the public of available benefits through a $1 million public education campaign. It secured legislation to evaluate Washington's welfare reform on the basis of more than caseload reduction, and created reporting requirements and procedural changes related to access to benefits, wage progression, job retention and customer service.

> Many state computers were not programmed to serve working families who still legally qualified for benefits. As a result, up to 100,000 people lost access to health insurance.

Further, the Working Group advocated for reinstatement of Medicaid coverage for people wrongly cut off Medicaid as a result of welfare reform and the establishment of an "informed choice" policy whereby families leaving welfare would automatically receive continuing medical coverage, unless they declined assistance.

Welfare Reform: An Explanation for the Confusion

Many welfare recipients shared a common misunderstanding of the new welfare system after the 1996 welfare reform law. They believed that Medicaid, food stamps and child care vouchers were a part of welfare and would be subject to the five-year time limit on cash assistance.

To further complicate matters, state computers were not programmed to serve working families who still legally qualified for these benefits. Thus, 100,000 people wrongfully lost access to health insurance. And, while the computer glitch was cause for concern, the bigger issue was that it went virtually unnoticed by state workers. Consequently, many working poor families rationed food, lived without proper medical care and dedicated large sums from scanty budgets to pay for health care.

Mobilizing to Effect Change

The Children's Alliance was in a unique position to convene advocates to focus on access to a comprehensive set of benefits. The Working Group, which consisted primarily of single-issue advocates, gathered in May 1999 to determine the best approach to ensure that working poor families received the benefits they needed to work their way out of poverty.

The Working Group's first move was to invite the federal Heath Care Financing Administration (HCFA) to review state Medicaid procedures

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HCFA found that the state was not following federal guidelines. In addition to HCFA's findings, the state released survey results showing that available Medicaid resources were not being used.

CA and its Working Group had clear evidence that in many cases working poor families were being incorrectly dropped from essential programs. It was also clear to CA that a minimum wage job was not enough to support a single parent with children without additional assistance.

A full media campaign was implemented to convince the Governor and state policy makers of the need for state workers, government officials and welfare recipients to have a better understanding of the mostly federally-funded benefits for which those leaving the welfare rolls still qualified. State policy makers needed to see the real people who were working hard, but failing to make it because of a lack of medical insurance, proper child care assistance and food stamps.

CA kicked off the campaign with a press conference which featured a woman who was meeting all of the demands of the new system, but who had lost her health care benefits. Group members also met with editorial writers and news reporters to explain the issue. These meetings culminated in a strategic victory when the state's largest and more conservative newspaper, The *Seattle Times*, ran an editorial criticizing the state's actions. Reporters also began mentioning the access to benefits problem when covering welfare stories.

In another effective campaign technique, the group held a rally on the Capitol steps while members of the state's part-time legislature were in town for important committee meetings. Calling it the "Keys to Success Rally," working families again recited their stories of being completely ousted from the benefits system, despite their qualifications for assistance. To further make its point, CA staffers and members of the coalition marched to the Governor's office with three keys to symbolize access to health care, food stamps and child [illegible]

Creating Change

Washington Governor Gary Locke, clearly on the hot seat, agreed to change the system. The Governor maintains a great deal of authority over the state's welfare program, so he was able to make significant changes without legislative approval.

> Our work isn't done, but we are impressed with the shift in organizational culture. Welfare offices are now measured on their customer service," says Jon Gould. "Our state is finally examining whether or not people who leave welfare are leaving poverty behind. It's long overdue.

The Working Group convinced the Governor to initiate a $1 million public education campaign to inform the public of available benefits. The group knew that in today's government, "what gets measured, gets done." Because of this, they pushed through legislation that evaluated Washington's welfare reform on more than reducing caseload. "We pushed state officials to measure the success of welfare reform based on poverty reduction, not caseload reduction," said Jon Gould, Community Action Director of the Children's Alliance. The Performance Measures legislation inspired sweeping change and forced the state's welfare agency to use new criteria to measure success:

- How much do families earn when they leave welfare?
- How long do they keep their new jobs?
- How hard/easy is it to obtain benefits such as health care, child care and food assistance?
- What kinds of customer service exists in the welfare offices?

By working with Columbia Legal Services, the Working Group obtained data from the state that showed over 100,000 people, including 40,000 children, had been wrongfully terminated from Medicaid. The group threatened to sue the state. The state agreed to reinstate all of the low-income people who identified themselves as wrongfully terminated and the state paid their unpaid medical bills. As a long term outcome, the state established an "informed choice" policy whereby families leaving welfare automatically receive continuing medical coverage, unless they decline assistance.

While CA's work continues, a sea change has occurred in how Washington State treats people leaving the welfare system, and in how Washington sees its role in the success of working families. The welfare system's efficiency is now judged on how well working families are treated, not simply on reducing caseloads.

Contact

Jon Gould
Community Action Director
Children's Alliance
2017 East Spruce Street
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 324-0340 ext 19 (phone)
(206) 325-6291 (fax)
jon@childrensalliance.org
www.childrensalliance.org

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Secure Emergency Pediatric Care

In 1998 Norma Dreyfus, a board member of Westchester Children's Association (WCA) – a county based member of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA) – brought to the attention of the WCA Board of Directors that emergency rooms and emergency medical services in Westchester County lacked adequate and appropriate equipment, training, and coordination to treat all pediatric emergencies. Current regulatory standards had allowed many hospital emergency rooms and EMS crews to operate in Westchester County (NY) without continuous coverage by caregivers trained in pediatric medicine.

Working closely with the Westchester County Legislature's Special Committee on Families, Westchester Children's Association secured funding for a pediatric-care training center for volunteer and ambulance service workers in the county. County emergency caregivers will soon receive instruction in Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) and other advanced pediatric curricula so that, during the critical period of patient transport to the ER, they may more quickly stabilize and treat children with acute traumas and serious cardio-respiratory ailments. This higher level of care could mean the difference between life and death for any one of Westchester's 224,000 children.

Emergency rooms and emergency medical services in Westchester County lacked adequate and appropriate equipment, training, and coordination to treat all pediatric emergencies.

The Problem

In Westchester, NY there are a total of 18 hospitals – 14 acute care hospitals and 4 specialty hospitals. Because the county government is without direct jurisdiction over the behavior of the hospitals, so long as the hospitals are in compliance with existing Joint Commission of Accreditation standards, the county can not legally compel the hospitals to bear the burden of local regulations. Although those sitting on the Special Committee on Families were left without a simple legislative remedy, WCA and others well understood that the county government possessed extensive resources that could be used both to focus attention on the issue and to press for change.

The Special Committee on Families struggled to define the depth and nature of the problems with emergency pediatric care in the county. It became clear that hospitals owned the equipment necessary to handle emergency pediatric cases but that most hospitals lacked full-time emergency room coverage by persons trained specifically to treat serious pediatric cases. Moreover, the committee learned that Westchester's EMS had 40 dispatchers who dispatched cases to a multitude of independent ambulance services; dispatchers could never be certain of which EMS units had EMTs appropriately trained to treat serious pediatric emergencies or even of which units owned the proper equipment to confront pediatric cases.

Emergency pediatric care in Westchester County lacked coordination. No single person, office, or institution in the county knew at which hospitals or on which EMS shifts doctors and EMTs with Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) training were operating. Without such knowledge, EMS crews could not properly treat or even decide where to take critically injured children.

Working To Solve The Problem

Westchester's local chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), of which WCA board member Norma Dreyfus was an active member, had been trying, albeit unsuccessfully,

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to advance an initiative intended to persuade county hospitals and emergency services to voluntarily adopt a set of pediatric care standards above and beyond the minimum standards required for accreditation. When in 1998 Dreyfus brought the AAP project to the attention of Cora Greenberg, Executive Director of WCA, and the WCA board, WCA added a segment about the improvement of pediatric emergency care to its annual Children's Issues Breakfast agenda. Unfortunately, the idea faltered in 1998. Allies were nowhere to be found and progress seemed unlikely without the cooperation of the hospitals. The hospitals, faced with stiff competition in the county and ever decreasing profit margins, were collectively unwilling to adopt voluntary standards to improve pediatric medical care.

Unshaken by frustrated efforts to get the improvement of pediatric care onto the county's agenda, WCA repeated its call for the improvement of pediatric emergency care in 1999. In attendance at the 1999 Children's Issues Breakfast was WCA board member Amy Paulin, also a permanent member of the county legislature's Special Committee on Families. Galvanized by WCA's presentation of the problems with pediatric care in the county, Amy Paulin seized the opportunity to bring the issue to the attention of the committee on behalf of WCA; the ball finally got rolling.

Even as WCA allied with the Special Committee on Families to address concerns about emergency medical care in the county, finding avenues for systemic reform would prove to be an exceedingly challenging and problem-laden process. All of the county's hospitals were invited to sit at the Special Committee on Families table but only three accepted the invitation to attend the meetings. Also at the meetings sat a representative from the Northern Metropolitan Hospital Association (NorMet), the county hospitals' trade organization, who, along with the hospital reps, was extremely wary of the possibility of further regulatory and financial burdens.

Among others who joined the Committee's work was a comprehensive and diverse set of individuals representing the medical and emergency services establishments in the county.

Getting Results

After countless sessions filled with hours of intense discussions and debate, the committee agreed upon a course of action; careful research and deliberation had yielded some consensus on the costs and benefits of coordinating pediatric care in the county and providing Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) training to county emergency workers. The committee understood that something had to be done: the state's guidelines for emergency care were dangerous for youth. Critically ill children faced uncertain fates in the hands of emergency room physicians and EMS staff versatile at handling complex adult trauma but unskilled in the techniques of advanced pediatric care. WCA and the Special Committee on Families believed that a training facility in pediatric care would work to fill a void in EMS services in the county. At the time, it was understood that without county funding, a means to accommodate advanced training for hospital staff and EMS workers would be expensive and thus impossible to implement.

> "Because of WCA's tireless efforts, all children who need emergency services will now receive pediatric care. WCA's role as an independent, credible voice for children was crucial in achieving this victory."
>
> — Cora Greenberg, Executive Director, Westchester Children's Association

The Special Committee on Families released a report in the early spring of 2001 detailing the issues brought to the attention of the committee by WCA and others; the report strongly recommended the creation of an emergency pediatric care training facility. Responding to the urgings of WCA and the Legislature's Special Committee on Families, Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano endorsed the committee's idea for the pediatric care training facility in his State of the County 2001 address.

Content with the knowledge that her efforts have made emergency pediatric care safer for Westchester's children, Cora Greenberg seems satisfied. She explains, "AWCA called upon its entire repertoire of skills over a three year period. The result will benefit every child who needs care for a serious sudden illness or trauma. WCA's role as an independent, credible voice for children was crucial in achieving this victory." WCA has made a big difference for children in Westchester County. Representatives of WCA sat in on every Special Committee on Families meeting, participated actively in discussions and negotiations at those sessions and toiled constantly behind the scenes struggling to make a difference for children. WCA deserves credit for its role as instigator, provocateur, and tireless advocate for children in Westchester County.

Contact

Cora Greenberg
Executive Director
Westchester Children's Association
175 Main Street • Suite 702
White Plains, NY 10601
(914) 946-7676 (phone)
(914) 946-7677 (fax)
cgreenberg@wca4kids.org
www.wca4kids.org

By Matthew I. Kaplan

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Improve Children's Oral Health With Water Fluoridation

When National Association of Child Advocates' (NACA) member Vision for Children Center (Vision), in San Antonio, held its 1998 Congress on Children, it slated children's oral health as a top priority for the coming year. Overwhelming evidence pointed to tooth decay among children in San Antonio as a serious, growing problem, especially for those from poorer families. Children were suffering from severe tooth decay and dental problems that sent them, often at a point where their teeth could no longer be saved, to emergency rooms and clinics. Many times their parents would have to miss work to wait in long lines for their children to get care. Dental problems were the main reason for absenteeism at San Antonio schools. At the time, San Antonio was one of the few cities in Texas without a fluoridated water supply.

Working against major opposition, Vision ran a public awareness campaign that put water fluoridation onto the November 2000 ballot for a public vote and, ultimately, passed the referendum to put fluoride in San Antonio's water supply. The physical pain, missed school time, and lost teeth that many poor children in the area suffered will be greatly reduced by the positive effects of fluoride in the water.

Why is Fluoridation Important?

C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General, once said "You don't have health unless you have oral health." Indeed, oral health is a significant aspect of wellness, and the effects of poor oral health are especially harmful for children who miss school or cannot concentrate in class when tooth decay goes untreated. Poor oral health can prevent young children from growing properly when it is severe, is associated with diabetes and has the potential to cause blood poisoning and bacterial endocarditis when bacteria from the mouth spread into the blood stream. Additionally, regular dental checkups can reveal other problems, such as abuse and neglect, malnutrition, growth problems, and oral tumors.

> "Although people living in fluoridated communities have 40% fewer cavities, some San Antonio residents feared a fluoridated water supply represented an attempt by the government to control its citizens."

Fluoride is an element that protects teeth from cavities, preventing decay before it starts. Adding fluoride to a community's water supply is the best way to dramatically improve the oral health of children, especially those who do not regularly see a dentist.

Fluoridation in a water supply is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and relatively inexpensive. Community water fluoridation efforts were initiated in 1945, and studies conducted through the 1930s and 1940s on children who consumed naturally occurring fluoridated water showed the benefits of fluoride for teeth. The American Dental Association and the American Medical Association have endorsed community water fluoridation as an effective way to decrease cavities in a population, and the Centers for Disease Control credits water fluoridation as one of the top ten public health achievements in the U.S. Currently, 90 percent of the largest U.S. cities have fluoridated water.

An Uphill Battle

When Vision identified water fluoridation as a crucial issue, it realized that there would be major opposition; previous fluoridation ballot initiatives in the city had tried and failed three times since 1966. During Vision's Congress on Children, the Water Fluoridation Task Force was created. Vision's Task Force researched the issues around fluoridation and children's oral health, as well as how the issue needed to be presented in order to be successful. It determined that fluoride made economic sense, as citizens

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would save $80 in health costs for every $1 spent on fluoridation. Parents and children would also save in lost work and school time for dental visits and in related doctor and hospital visits. They concluded that the issue needed to be presented clearly in terms of children's health, since children were the main victims of the dental decay that fluoride would help prevent. The Task Force also decided that, due to the opposition on the topic, the issue would need to be put on a ballot for a general election where a larger group of voters would be present. With the next election being the 2000 Presidential election, they decided they needed to move quickly to keep momentum going on the issue.

City council support was necessary, as getting an item on the ballot requires a city council vote and collecting enough signatures for a petition was impractical. Vision began approaching members of the city council and launched an education campaign to meet with community leaders, neighborhood groups, parent-teacher associations, and students at local universities to present the facts and gain support.

> "By framing fluoridation as a children's health issue, Vision led the movement to success, securing a fluoridated water supply for all of San Antonio's children."
>
> Marian Sokol
> Founding Executive Director of Vision for Children Center

Dissemination of factual information was necessary to counter what had quickly become a strong anti-fluoridation movement. Opponents viewed efforts to fluoridate San Antonio's water supply as evidence of the government's attempts to control its citizens by forcing them to drink "poison." Many believed, falsely, that fluoride would cause cancer and bone breakage. Opposition groups used scare tactics and publicized misleading information. They put up signs proclaiming "Fluoride is Corrosive Poison" and targeted low-income communities.

Finally, 300 child advocates organized by the Task Force, as well as members of the anti-fluoride opposition, gathered at the city council meeting in August 2000. Council members voted unanimously to put the fluoridation issue on the November ballot.

Educating the Public

After this major success, Vision's Water Fluoridation Task Force was divided into two groups in order to effectively gather support for the November ballot initiative: a community education group and a political action committee (PAC). While the political action committee worked to gather support among the local business leaders, the community education group continued a campaign to educate the public about fluoride, presenting facts to counter the emotional messages launched by the opposition.

Vision received a $250,000 grant from the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, a San Antonio community foundation that supports children's issues. Requirements for the grant necessitated a quick and intense six-week campaign that would have to end before the election. Vision stepped up its efforts, speaking with bilingual communities, low-income parents, and local community watchdog groups, Communities Organized for Public Service (C.O.P.S.) and the Metro Alliance, in which many Hispanic and black parents are involved, about the benefits of fluoride. The support of these community groups, along with the successful ad campaign being run by the PAC (which raised $300,000 for its campaign), helped to counter the misleading information being presented to the public by opponents of fluoridation.

A turning point for Vision for Children's efforts came when the Archbishop of San Antonio expressed his support for Vision's efforts to fluoridate the water, as San Antonio has a large, faithful Catholic population. The support secured from other key individuals, such as the current and former mayor, a well-known member of the city council, and the newspaper, was also crucial to Vision's eventual success. Having strong public figures who were also trusted by the community support this effort helped fluoride supporters gain legitimacy as well as political clout.

Getting Results

Finally, amid intense mobilization from both sides of the fluoride issue, the November election yielded success. By a narrow 6% margin, San Antonio had voted to fluoridate its water supply. Preparations are currently underway for fluoridation in the near future.

Vision for Children Center's success in securing fluoridated water for better oral health is not only a positive step for kids, but it is also a milestone for San Antonio. Children in San Antonio now have the opportunity for improved oral health and will be less likely to miss school due to toothaches and related illnesses. To pass the referendum, members of the community needed to become educated about children's issues, and they needed to understand that low-income families could not afford regular dental care. Voters in San Antonio became educated on an important issue and voted on a controversial topic in favor of children's health. The success of the fluoridation efforts is promising for Vision's ability to address other children's issues in San Antonio in the future.

Contact

Marian Sokol
Co-Founder, Vision for Children Center
c/o Any Baby Can, Inc.
217 Howard Street
San Antonio, TX 78212
(210)227-0170 (phone)
(210)227-0812 (fax)
msokol@anybabycansa.org
www.anybabycansa.org

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Persuade Policy Makers to Use Beer Tax and TANF to Fund Early Care Options

In 1999, Arkansas state legislators in the House Education Committee debated whether limited new funds for early care and education should be used to expand subsidized child care or to improve the quality of early care programs. The committee voted to use the additional funds to expand child-care subsidies to low income working families. However, this meant that the Arkansas Better Chance Program (ABC) – a quality early care program for children in low-income families – would not receive any increase in its appropriation, leaving the program at its 1992 funding level. Arguing that both programs needed increased funding, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, vowed to work between the 1999 and 2001 legislative sessions to find ways to both expand access and improve the quality of early care programs in Arkansas.

AACF mobilized a broad constituency under the name Arkansas Kids Count Coalition (Coalition) to address the growing need for quality early care programs in Arkansas: providers, researchers, advocates and parents all collaborated in the development of an agenda addressing both quality and access to early child care. AACF facilitated the Coalition's monthly meetings and sat on the Coalition's Executive Committee, steering the Coalition's efforts to protect vital early care programming. The Coalition's work led the 2001 Arkansas General Assembly to find new funding sources for early care. In addition to passing Senate Bill 576 (SB 576), a 3% excise tax on beer to expand ABC and provide subsidies for low income working parents, the Arkansas legislature passed a bill to transfer 11% of the state's annual TANF block grant to child care ($12 million over the biennium). AACF's efforts ensured that funding for quality early care in Arkansas would be continued and expanded in the years to come.

> AACF knew that state budgetary cutbacks in early care programming appropriations would severely impact the many thousands of at risk children served annually by the programs.

Forming A Broad Coalition of Support

In the Fall of 2000, the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition helped fund a public opinion poll of the state's registered voters to learn if there was public support for quality early care. The Coalition believed that a show of broad public support for early care programming would encourage the state's legislators and governor to prioritize early care programming in their respective budget proposals. Two major findings came out of the poll:

- Overwhelming public support for improving access to quality care for working families. By more than a 3-to-1 margin, voters supported increasing their own taxes to improve access to quality care.
- Strong support (86%) for increased alcohol taxes to fund access to quality child care.

After presenting their ambitious agenda and poll results to legislative leaders prior to the session, child care advocates quickly learned that major stumbling blocks were in the way. Governor Huckabee was committed to providing teacher pay increases, but at the expense of funding for early care. A slowing state economy meant there would not be enough revenue to fund the ambitious child care agenda. And, behind the scenes, the threat of a possible judgment against the state in a school funding case meant that $700 million to $1 billion in new funding might be needed to meet court-mandated obligations

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Despite the potential roadblocks, the child care community remained strong and united. The Coalition quickly regrouped and developed a scaled-back, but still significant, child care agenda that would address both quality and access. An agreement over a dedicated transfer of TANF dollars to child care was worked out late in the session after negotiations by Department of Human Services and child care advocates. The transfer passed the Joint Budget Committee with no opposition. The real battle was over SB 576, the excise tax on beer.

The Battle Over A Beer Tax

The fact that SB 576 would place a 3% excise tax on beer made it controversial with some legislators, despite the fact that it would provide thousands of Arkansas' low income children with both center-based and home-based instruction programs designed to meet "quality" early childhood education standards. Even after an intense grassroots campaign by child care advocates – including AACF, the Good Faith Fund and citizen lobbyists – it became clear that the bill would fall one vote short of the four votes needed to pass out of the Arkansas Senate Revenue and Tax Committee. To sway one vote, the bill was amended from a 3% to a 1% tax rate. Those now supporting the bill included members of both political parties. After passage, SB 576 went to the House Rules Committee. The challenge there was even greater than in the Senate. After a week of intense advocacy by the child care community, the fate of SB 576 was still uncertain.

> AACF and the Coalition succeeded in securing funding for the continuation and expansion of Arkansas Better Chance (ABC), which will provide thousands of Arkansas' low income children with quality early childhood education.

During the second week when SB 576 was stalled in committee, other events began to unfold that would impact the bill's fate. With three weeks left in the session, the Department of Finance and Administration announced, to no one's surprise, that state revenue growth had slowed and there would not be enough revenue available to fund teacher pay increases. To make up the short-fall, the Governor announced major budget cuts in numerous programs including cutting the ABC appropriation by 70%.

Fighting and Winning an Uphill Battle

The ABC budget cuts galvanized the child care and early education community. Under the leadership of AACF, lobbyists and ABC supporters from across the state swamped Governor Huckabee's office, the Department of Education, and legislators with phone calls demanding that ABC funding be restored. For two weeks, a group of more than 20 child care advocates and citizen lobbyists camped out at the capitol urging their legislators to restore ABC funding.

The campaign worked — to a degree. Although partial funding for ABC was restored, the program would still see major budget cuts unless alternative funding could be found. The timing of the ABC budget cuts, however, could not have been better for SB 576. At the urging of several legislators on the House Rules Committee, SB 576 was amended back to a 3 % tax rate, with 80 % of the funding going to ABC and 20 % going to subsidized child care. Under intense pressure from the child care and early education community, the House Rules Committee passed SB 576 over the objections of influential corporate lobbyists, including Arkansas beer distributors, Miller Brewing Co., independent grocers, Arkansas Farm Bureau and Riceland Foods, a major corporate entity in the state. The battle became even more intense in the full House. Two days before the session's end, SB 576 passed the full House with 65 votes. Since SB 576 had been amended from its original form passed by the Senate, it had to go back to the Senate for approval. By then, the momentum for SB 576 was greater than anyone could have imagined. The Senate Revenue and Tax Committee approved SB 576 the same afternoon it was approved by the full House. Then, to everyone's surprise, SB 576 was considered and passed easily by the full Senate later that same day.

According to the emerging research on early brain development, quality care is critical to the intellectual, social, and physical well-being of young children. Programs that meet quality standards are more likely to provide children with a learning experience designed to promote their intellectual and social development. The continuation and expansion of A Better Chance (ABC) will provide thousands of Arkansas' low income children with both center-based and home-based instruction programs designed to meet "quality" early childhood education standards.

Contact

Paul Kelly
Senior Program Coordinator
Arkansas Advocates for
Children & Families
523 S. Louisiana • #700
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 371-9678 (phone)
(501) 371-9681 (fax)
paulkell@swbell.net (email)
www.aradvocates.org

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